

LOVE OF THE BRETHREN, AND LOVE OF THE TRUTH—DO THEY EVER CONFLICT IN THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION?

(By: T. A. Smith)

Love of the Truth, and Love of the Brethren—Do They Ever Conflict in the Hour of Temptation? The answer is No! The reason is that all of us as brethren, are in the Truth; and the Truth is our guide in loving one another.

We mutually love the truth of the Harvest Message—the doctrines instruct us in understanding the Divine Plan; the exhortations and warnings guide us in proper conduct; and the promises provide us with hope for wonderful rewards beyond the veil. If we set any of this truth aside or become confused on the truth, our love for the brethren is affected adversely.

We remember how our Pastor had deep love of the brethren; and his love for the brethren was in the framework of the truth. In the truth our love for the brethren is affectionate, tender, longsuffering, considerate and self-sacrificing. This is how Peter expresses it (1 Peter 1:22): “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the Truth through the spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.” How simple and clear this is. Wm. Jennings Bryan said one time that the “mere defining of terms clarifies a subject, and makes manifest the truth.”

The Truth is from the Heavenly Father—if we have the spirit of sonship, we will love that truth with all our hearts; and our love for the brethren in the truth will correspond to our intensity of our love for the truth.

In the verse quoted from Peter a moment ago, the word love is used twice and from two different Greek words. First, brotherly love—“unfeigned love of the brethren.” We recognize as brethren of the same family, all who trust in the precious blood, consecrated to walk in the Redeemer’s footsteps. Not a mere smile on the face and handshake, but genuine, unfeigned acceptance regardless of race, color, education, poverty, talent or beauty. Second—“See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.” Agape love—do everything within our power for brethren even to the laying down of life or using our energies in behalf of the brethren. This means following the “New Commandment”—love one another as Christ loved the disciples. Sacrificial love exemplified in God’s love for humanity and Jesus’ love in giving his life a ransom sacrifice to be manifested to and for all—educated, uneducated, rich, poor, talented, untalented, mature, babes, strong, weak.

This is a vital point for it is only those who have this kind of active love of the brethren that have passed from death unto life—1 John 3:14, “We know that we have passed from

death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” This love grows: at first perhaps merely obedience to the idea. Later it expands to a natural heart condition of unselfish interest in the welfare of one another. It is “pure”—it thinks, says, does nothing evil regarding the brethren. If it sees any lack it reaches out to be helpful. It thinks sympathetically.

As we grow in knowledge and truth and grace, we see imperfections more readily, and clearly—in ourselves and in the brethren, and in the world. It is a great test upon us that we do not become faultfinders, but try to understand the temperaments of one another and be patient and gracious. As Paul says in Rom. 15:1: “We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”

“Bearing these infirmities” does not mean that we ignore them, but that we bear with them patiently while we try to help the weak overcome their infirmities. Some of the Lord’s people who are naturally noble, being born so, find it hard to bear the infirmities of the weak. As Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:26, “For ye see your calling brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.”

The natural noble ones of the world, when they become Christians, find it a test upon them to accept and gladly serve those who are below them according to the flesh. Unless this battle is won, these naturally noble ones run the risk of losing the prize of the high calling.

The natural trait of combativeness is another trait that must be controlled and guided by the principles of agape love. Truth takes hold on stronger rather than weaker characters—such have firmness, grittiness and combativeness—the Lord is not pleased with those who have no grit or back bone. Only those who are in dead earnest are able to combat and be victorious—yet such should be careful not to be blunt or treat others roughly. We must be like diamonds, yet well covered with oil.

Our Lord said in Matt. 5:9 that “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” We are to try to promote peace and not be strife-breeders; yet this is not to be “peace at any price” because James tells us that the “wisdom which is from above is first pure, and then peaceable.” This important bit of knowledge is found in Jas. 3:17. (R5125-4)

In discussions on certain scriptures, where differences are slight, and it does not matter much either way we look at it, it is best to grant one another full liberty of thought and

not try to force unanimity of thought. It is the tendency of strong characters to want to argue to a finish and crush the other fellow's opinion. In the truth we should be content to present our viewpoint and listen to the other's viewpoint. Notice I said, IN THE TRUTH. For instance on the book of Revelation, I think I have heard more interpretations of its symbols than in any other book in the Bible. Yet I see no reason to get concerned because there is no way to prove some interpretations.

It is extremely important to respect the consciences of one another. In Rom. 14:21 Paul wrote: "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." We must never try to crush the operation of the conscience of another; but try to educate the conscience if we can. Some have weak judgments and sometimes we have to give up some liberties so as not to stumble those who have weak judgments. I have noticed over the years, that it is good not to insist on our opinions on world affairs for example, because we do not all have the same knowledge to draw upon to form opinions.

In voting in ecclesia affairs we all must follow our consciences according to our best judgments, and respect one another for so doing. We must never think that there is a lack of brotherly love when one follows his conscience as to what is good and what is not good. As Paul says in Heb. 5:14, "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." In having our "senses exercised to discern both good and evil," we must come to understand that what is sometimes called a "lovely spirit" is not necessarily the spirit of love, the spirit of the Lord. Some by nature are very agreeable, very gracious in their manner, courteous and suave in manner. How do we know, how can we tell when this "lovely spirit" is not the Holy Spirit? When this "lovely spirit" is being exercised by someone who is opposing the truth or who is downgrading the importance of the ministry of "That Servant" and the Harvest Message, then we know this so-called "lovely spirit" is not the Holy Spirit, not the spirit of the Lord. Our Pastor speaks of this matter in an interesting fashion. He says that gentleness, meekness and patience are elements of a holy character, but they are merely little twigs or branches. (R4480-6) There are other elements of a holy character that are much more important. They are loyalty to God, loyalty to Christ, loyalty to the divine plan, loyalty to the divine appointments and arrangements. Gentleness, meekness, patience, prove nothing in themselves, because these can be duplicated by the natural man. Peter gives us important advice along this line in 2 Pet. 2:3, when he says that "through covetousness shall some make merchandise of you with feigned words." So we have to use careful judgment when we listen to someone who is very courteous and suave—unless we are careful, we could be badly misled.

I have run up against this sort of thing in the past and I felt it necessary to oppose some who were thought to have such a "lovely spirit." You can find this same "lovely spirit"

shown by people of the world and some branches of religion that are contrary to the truth of the Christian religion. I have learned that I must be careful not to be deceived by a “lovely spirit”—it may or may not be the Lord’s spirit. True brotherly love goes far beyond this “lovely spirit”—it refrains from injuring the brethren in any way; it is interested in the well-being and eternal welfare of the brethren; it tries to be helpful in laying down one’s life for the brethren.

Our conduct toward the Lord’s people varies according to circumstances. Let us note 1 Thess. 5:12 to 14, especially the 14th verse: “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves.” (Now we note the 14th verse in particular: “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all.”) All of this is loving the brethren because this is the way God wants us to treat the brethren. We must of necessity make a difference among brethren—as to how a brother is to be treated is determined by the brother’s condition of character. (R3034) If we make no difference between brethren, then we take away the premium of special love toward those brethren who are walking carefully after the spirit. Those who do well are dealt with differently than those who are doing poorly, yet it is brotherly love in both cases. I can remember my Mother’s experience after Bro. Russell died. She was in the Burlington class and she was calling attention to Judge Rutherford’s departures from the truth. The elder answered: “Yes, sister, you are absolutely right, but we must love the brethren.” This elder soft-pedaled the Society’s erroneous teachings and practices, and he went along with the Society until he died. My Mother took a firm, loving stand for the Truth, and suffered isolation and was disfellowshipped. If she had followed the Society, it is entirely possible that I would not be standing here before you at this moment. I might have been switched off from the Truth and its service.

What is the proper relationship of the congregation to its elders? The congregation has everything to say regarding meetings—where held, the number of meetings, by whom conducted and the character of the lessons and studies. These are not matters for an elder to decide, yet he has a right as a member of an ecclesia to be heard. An elder is acting beyond his rights if he insists on his plans and suggestions.

I believe we have given a brief but fairly complete summary of the Scriptural thoughts as to what love of the brethren really means: It considers the present and eternal welfare of the Lord’s people; it is tender, longsuffering, patient and humble toward all the brethren; it endeavors to be wise and firm in conformity with the principles of truth; in certain cases of necessity, it is characterized by severity in manner.

We can consider our love for the truth by the use of an illustration: A rich man in New York invites you and your brothers to go to New York. He furnishes you with a high

priced car to drive. You are thrilled and prize the car highly and take good care of it because it will take you and your brothers to New York. You keep the car in good repair for if it broke down you could not get to New York. If your brothers try to take the car to pieces or discard it, you remind them that the car has been provided by the rich man to take them all to New York. This invitation fits our position exactly—we have an invitation from the Heavenly Father, and the Truth has been given to us to carry us to our destination. We must get into this truth—we must have the holy spirit of truth to carry us along to our destination. Our providential experiences are the signposts along the way—we must watch these signposts very carefully so we will not get on the wrong road. What do we mean by “the Truth” in our day? We mean the whole fabric of the Harvest Message—the doctrines, the exhortations and the precious promises and the understanding of prophetic subjects. Our illustration fits so well because it shows that we are not lacking in brotherly love when we reason with our brethren, not to take the car to pieces or discard it.

The Bible itself contains the Truth, but the Bible is not easy to understand and our Heavenly Father uses special ones to assist us to grasp the meaning of the Bible. As the Apostle explains to us in Eph. 4:11, 12: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” And again in 1 Thess. 5:12, 13: “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.”

In our day we have found the chief mechanic has been our Pastor—he has had associated with him fellow-mechanics, but he was chief—he had a good measure of the Holy Spirit of Truth and we have learned from him to run the car. If we are not forgetful drivers, we believe the car will carry us on clear to the end of the way. If some of our brethren are disposed to listen to other spiritual mechanics, and they will not listen to us, then we shall have to let them go their way, while we go ours. Our brethren in past centuries made use of the same Bible and they were able to make their calling and election sure with what truth they had. But the car they had would not be suitable for us to use today. It had too many loose parts and it made a lot of noise when in operation. The brethren who used the car at the time did not know it was so decrepit. We have a brand new car—the Harvest Message gives us a complete understanding of the Divine Plan and now we have a harmonized Bible. No rattling noises now from the eternal torment doctrine, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and the missing part of the doctrine of restitution, and the trinity doctrine. All the various screws and bolts are in their proper places and securely tightened—our car runs noiselessly and smoothly and rapidly to our destination. As one brother said, “How they would have rejoiced with our truth.” We are not ashamed of our wonderful car. There are a lot of sporty cars today such as Christian

Science, Evolution, Unity, New Thought and the heathen religions. We think ours is the best.

We should take note of God's providences providing us with our up-to-date spiritual knowledge—the Berean, topical method study is the best of all. All this is the fulfillment of our Lord's promise: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." And Luke 12:37: "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching; verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." If Bro. Russell, Bro. Barton, Bro. Dr. John Edgar made their calling and election sure on what our present Lord has provided, cannot we do the same? I THINK SO! So I think we can see that love of the truth and love of the brethren never conflict, if we know what the truth is, and if we know what love of the brethren really is.

Up to this point I have not touched upon the Hour of Temptation. I think the general consensus of opinion is that we are in the Hour of Temptation. This is the Hour or time of trial and is supposed to come upon the whole world to try them that dwell upon the earth. What is the nature of the temptation or trial? We are in the last days and Paul tells us what the conditions will be like in the last days. 2 Tim. 3:1 to 5: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

An analysis of these characteristics leads us to believe the trial or temptation concerns unselfishness and patient endurance. All around us we see that very few want to endure anything for righteousness' sake, for Christ's sake, or for the sake of anyone else. And if endurance is made a necessity, there is very much of impatience and complaining. This has a bearing upon us as Christians—we are walking the Narrow Way and are going against public sentiment and custom. (R2792:2-2) It is a severe test upon us to resist this spirit and try to be unselfish and patient. But God has supplied his people with a mighty power, inspiration and leadership to withstand the influences of the unrighteous spirit in the world today.

We are in the Laodicean period of the church and Jesus said "behold I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." We believe this Scripture was intended to be a prophetic promise. We believe this promise has been fulfilled in the ministry of our Pastor from the years 1879 to 1916—as represented in the Watch Towers, Studies in the Scriptures and kindred publications. Question—what has this to do with protecting us from the worldly

spirit of selfishness and impatience? you ask. Answer—it has everything to do with it! In the first place it protects us from the erroneous winds of doctrine that are peculiar to the end of the age, such as Christian Science, New Thought, Unity, etc.; and things peculiar to Bible Students today. How could this be? you ask. Greater knowledge today is showing up the errors of the creeds of the churches; and if it were not for the Truth, giving us better knowledge of the Bible, we might be inclined to take up with these false ideas. But what is still more important, the spirit of the truth protects us from the spirit of the world.

How does this work? In this way: do we not learn of the lovingkindness of our God and our dear Saviour? Does not the harmonization of the Bible show us God's love in a way that is positively inspiring to those in the right condition of heart? God's love is understood in a general way by people in the churches. But how many understand God's love as we Bible Students have been privileged to understand it? And further, what about the glories of the doctrine of restitution?—restoring the obedient of mankind back to original perfection in righteousness, love, peace and happiness? What about our understanding of the Judgment Day, which will give all an individual opportunity to accept righteousness and live forever? What about the high calling—the invitation to the church to suffer with Christ now, and be joint-heirs with him in glory, honor and immortality? Question: Does not the unparalleled harmonization of these beautiful truths inspire those in the right condition of heart with gratitude and love to God? We must realize what a good thing we have in our possession. Spending a few days in the Pastoral work will convince anyone of how blessed we are above Christian people in general—in appreciation of God's plan of lovingkindness for mankind, and the church in particular.

But this harmonization of understanding of God's lovingkindness is not the only advantage of the Harvest message in protecting us from the worldly spirit. Question: What about the lessons of character development that are constantly brought to our attention in the Volumes and in the Reprints? What is the keynote of all these lessons? Is it not Christ-likeness; is it not love—love for God, love of every principle of righteousness, love of the brethren, love of the world, including enemies? The best part of these lessons to us is that they are made understandable to us in their application to the practical affairs of the Christian life. In addition to all this, is that the truth is a mighty power to us in the example of the one who was used of the Lord to give the truth to us.

Question: “But,” you ask, “what has all this to do with our duty, our love to the brethren?” If we catch the spirit of all this truth, we can set a good example to the brethren. We cannot make the brethren do things; we cannot carry them into the Kingdom on our shoulders. But we can lay down our lives for the brethren—we can set a good example as to what we believe is right.

If we believe the truth as set forth in the Volumes and the Reprints is the provision of our present Lord to protect us from error—we can show this by our example! If we believe the truth harmonizes the scriptures so we understand God's character and plan better than it would otherwise be possible to understand them—we can show this by our example! If we believe this truth has enthused us with the hope of being heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ—we can show this by our example! If we believe the truth has shown us and is showing us how to be better Christians—we can show this by our example!

This will mean: A manifestation of the fruits of the spirit and the putting away of the works of the flesh; The bearing of one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ; As we have opportunity we shall do the work of our anointing and do good unto all men, especially the household of faith; We shall obey the new commandment of Christ—that we love one another as he loved us; In general and in particular we shall be sanctified by the truth—that we shall set an example of one strong in the faith, and in love and in hope, showing fervent love for the brethren.

We all acknowledge that many Bible Students are in a very lean spiritual condition, even some who keep the doctrines pure. Some are inclined to blame this on what they think is too much doctrine in our Pastor's writings. But, I personally believe the real blame is failure of ourselves to respond to the intention of knowledge. In my opinion, the trouble is that we don't study doctrine enough, or, to put it in other words—we don't practice what we study. I don't think we should blame our faithful Pastor or blame the precious Harvest Message. If we should be too sleepy and don't love the truth enough, we should blame ourselves. In our love to the brethren, it is our duty to adhere to the policies of the Pastor in his ministry. I know of no greater duty to, or greater service to, the brethren, than setting an example of being strong Christians in faith, hope and love. And I know of no better way to do this than sticking closely to the truth as we have learned it (the spirit of the truth); and follow the example of our dear Pastor in his personal life and in his policies as a teacher in the church.

In this connection, I am reminded of an article in the Nov. 1, 1916 Tower entitled THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION. This article came out just before our Pastor's death; and it set forth the principles concerning sound teachings and sound teachers to elect in the church. Our Pastor saw working in the church the spirit of selfishness in certain brethren; and this manifested itself or came to the surface immediately after the Pastor's death. Certain leaders attempted to lord it over God's people; and instead of continuing to serve the brethren, helping them to become more established in the truth, and go on in serving the truth and developing the sweet and precious graces of the spirit—they brought forth new teachings intended to draw away disciples after themselves. And those who opposed these efforts were treated in a most shameful manner. And this same spirit of selfishness still exists—in some it is somewhat mild, in others it is harsh and bold.

So in closing I don't believe I could do better than to quote a few sentences here and there from this article entitled THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION:

“What we are about to write is far from what we would prefer, but it seems to be our duty as respects the Lord's cause and people. We believe that a great crisis is upon the Bible Students; and that the sooner it is discerned, the more successfully it may be passed....It causes real grief to write that much of the difficulty and danger to the church seems to lie at the door of the elders and deacons—not all, thank God, but apparently a small minority....The true, loyal servants in the church should be all the more appreciated by the Lord's people in proportion as they realize the difference between true elders and deacons and those who are untrue. Nor are we writing with a view to the discouragement of the unfaithful, but rather to open their eyes out of the snare of the adversary and become helpers of the Lord's Flock, instead of hinderers.

“From reports given us, a horrible state of affairs prevails in some classes when an election is to be held. The servants of the church attempt to be rulers, dictators—sometimes even holding the chairmanship of the meeting with the apparent object of seeing that they and their special friends shall be elected as elders and deacons....Of course, there are various degrees of brazen-facedness in such matters...

“Additionally, it may generally be expected that such as manifest an ambition of this kind to be leaders and teachers and to ignore the principles of the golden rule, as well as the special instructions for the new creation, are generally the ones who bring in false doctrines...

“In many cases, the classes are solely to blame, according to their own statement...

“The selection of improper leaders is evidently a sin, and quite a reflection against the classes who have the improper leaders. How could such get into positions to represent the Lord's people, except by the latter's votes? When will the Lord's people learn that ability to talk in public is only one of the qualifications of an elder? Time and again we have noted how the Lord's cause has been hindered, and spirituality amongst the brethren has been stifled, by attempts to imitate the nominal church in putting forward persons glib of tongue, lacking in spirituality...

“It is inexcusable for the church, possessed of the spirit of the Master...the spirit of fidelity to what we believe to be the truth to continue under the domination of ambitious men (and sometimes ambitious women).

“Repeatedly Bible Students write us that their elders try to hinder them from the use of the Watch Tower Society's publications as textbooks in Bible study....Sometimes as

rulers they forbid the use of these in the classes. We are asked what should be done under such circumstances.

“We reply, let those who wish to follow such leaders do so—that is their right. We shall wish them well. But let us not follow with them nor submit for a moment to such arrangements...

“Let us make a discrimination between the positive teachings of the Bible—the doctrines of Christ—and the slightly variant ways of expressing those doctrines. We are not to expect any two persons to use exactly the same words; but there are certain doctrines which are fast and immovable from the viewpoint of the majority of Bible Students. And one not in good harmony with those pretensions should not be encouraged in the slightest degree, but, on the contrary, should be discouraged. If he has different views, do not persecute him—do not follow the style of the dark ages, but follow the proper course of letting him ‘flock to himself’, or with as many as prefer to view matters as he views them.

“We have not given such strong advice heretofore; [notice that—‘We have not given such strong advice heretofore’—my comment] but we perceive that many of the dear sheep are being troubled, hindered of development, and imposed upon. We see that proportionately such elders and deacons are growing more bold, and hence the need is the greater that all who do have the right spirit, and who realize that under the Lord’s guidance in our study of the divine plan of the ages, we have not been following ‘cunningly devised fables,’ should now take a positive stand...

“The lesson to us is that no matter how great, no matter how able any brother or sister may be, this will not make such fit to be a leader of the Lord’s people unless he have additionally the all-important items—first, a knowledge of the Lord’s word; and second, the possession of a good degree of the spirit of truth—one who always dare to be trusted as an ambassador of the Lord. None other should be recognized as teachers or leaders amongst the Lord’s people...

“It is in view of these things that we feel justified in urging upon the classes of Bible Students everywhere that they esteem with double honor such elder brethren as manifest the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of meekness, the spirit of gentleness, the spirit of patience, the spirit of longsuffering, the spirit of brotherly-kindness, and the spirit of love—those who have a good knowledge of the Word of God and of the divine plan, and who manifest an appreciation of the spirit of truth, the spirit of holiness, and who have an aptness to teach; and that on the contrary all others be refused.” (R5982) (End of quotation.)

And so summing up: our duty to the brethren, in love to them is to become strong Christians and help them to become strong Christians. This means an appreciation of the knowledge of the Divine plan that we have in our possession; remembering the publications and instrument used of the Lord to assist us to trace the Divine Plan in the Scriptures for ourselves. Then we are to seek to imbibe the spirit of the truth especially those things which pertain to the graces of the spirit. And we are to lay down our lives in the service of the truth and the brethren, seeking to be noble patterns in patient endurance and keeping down any disposition in ourselves to lord it over the Lord's people, or bring in new teachings calculated to draw disciples after ourselves. Ambitious brethren should be resisted and faithful brethren should be encouraged and supported. (See Poem "IN MEMORIAM" Reprint page 6350.)